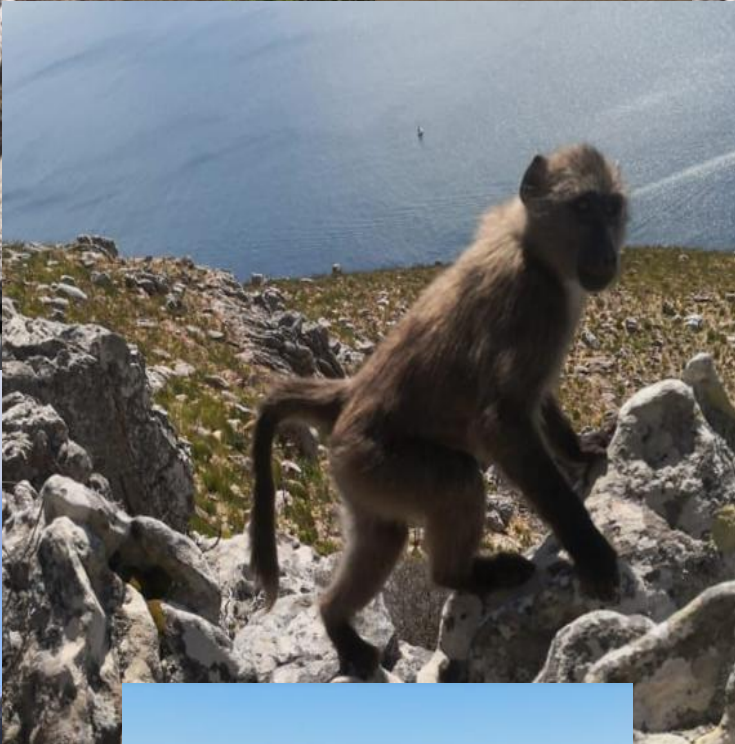


Millers point





GREEN GROUP SIMONSTOWN NPC (GGST)

And

**The Southern African
Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)**
MEMBERS OF THE BABOON ADVISORY GROUP (BAG)

SUBMIT COMMENTS

to the City of Cape Town, CapeNature, and SANParks
(acting together as the Joint Task Team)
on the [Proposed Baboon Action Plan](#)

To

The Cape Peninsula Baboon Joint Task Team
City of Cape Town
City of Cape Town Coastal Management
CapeNature
SANParks
Shark Spotters / Cape Baboon Partnership
Table Mountain National Park

Cc:

Minister of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment Deon George
Premier of the Western Cape Alan Winde
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

29 August 2025

**COVER: The Seaforth Troop living peacefully and cohesively in natural spaces
on the mountain or in desert coastal areas across 2024.**

**These are only a few of the many images taken by Green Group Simonstown's monitors
during the Baboon Monitoring Civil Coexistence Pilot Project and shared with the
community of Simon's Town**

For info: admin@greengroupsimonstown.org

Without accountability, there can be no democracy.

Nelson Mandela

Without accountability, there is no true reconciliation and no healing.

Desmond Tutu

*In every deliberation, we must consider the impact
on the seventh generation yet to come.*

Indigenous voice

*A body of men, holding themselves accountable to nobody,
ought not to be trusted by anybody.*

Thomas Paine



Image Credit: Gentina Danurendra

INVALID

It is both disingenuous and unlawful that three statutory authorities, the City of Cape Town, CapeNature, and SANParks, have abdicated their constitutional and statutory duty to ensure meaningful public participation in matters of public interest, instead forcing this duty onto civil society and NGOs. Such conduct is inconsistent with principles of cooperative governance, transparency, and accountability enshrined in section 195 of the South African Constitution, as well as the requirements for lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair administrative action under the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (PAJA).

By allocating a mere 14 days for public comment and forcing NGOs and Associations to take the burden of consulting the broad public in such a limited time, the authorities have effectively undermined the very purpose of consultation, which requires a genuine opportunity for stakeholders to participate and influence decision-making. A process of this kind cannot be regarded as consultation in any meaningful sense, but rather as a perfunctory and predetermined exercise.

We accordingly submit that this process constitutes a procedural irregularity that renders it fundamentally flawed, unreasonable, and invalid. It falls short of constitutional obligations to facilitate participatory democracy as well as statutory obligations to ensure proper consultation.

For these reasons, we object to the process as currently designed and record that it cannot form a lawful basis for any decisions that may follow.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is our considered position that the proposed Cape Peninsula Baboon Draft Action Plan (the Plan) reflects years of inadequate action, disinterest, unaccountability, negligence, and failure by the responsible authorities to adopt collaborative solutions in the public interest, contrary to principles of cooperative governance and democracy. Now, facing public outcry, these entities propose to advance, as the most viable solution, a *hard reset*. This framework would entail the physical elimination of possibly 120 or 200 baboons or even more, from the Cape Peninsula, effectively, possibly erasing entire troops. In practice, in our understanding, mass killing was proposed at an expert meeting as the most suitable option on the table of the discussion, while relocation and contraception were proposed as less viable options. While the City of Cape Town has invested years of public money into violent (and, we argue, ineffective) strategies, collectively, the competent authorities have indeed failed to implement adequate mitigation measures. The proposed *hard reset* is an ecologically questionable quick-fix remedy that would undermine our heritage, fuel fear, abuse, and division in the present of our society, and jeopardise future generations by dismantling ecological integrity and the foundations of social coexistence and justice. **We contest both the flawed decision-making process and the proposed outcomes it seeks to justify.**

INTRODUCTION

[Green Group Simonstown \(GGST\)](#) Green Group Simonstown NPC (GGST) is a registered non-profit dedicated to advancing human–wildlife coexistence through innovative, community-driven solutions. Our work prioritises ethical, holistic approaches that safeguard our natural heritage and biodiversity for the benefit of all life, including humans, now and for generations to come.

MANDATE OF GGST

In 2024, GGST was elected by the Simon’s Town community and supporting organisations to represent them on the [Cape Peninsula Baboon Advisory Group](#) (BAG). In line with its [Terms](#)

[of Reference](#), BAG members are mandated to serve as a two-way communication channel between authorities responsible for baboon management on the Cape Peninsula and the public.

We formally submit our comments, integrating inputs from the community.

Our submission is supported by SAFCEI – BAG Member

Our submission is supported by the following organisations:

....

In addition, individual comments we received from the public in a small the limited timeframe allowed by the JTT, are [accessible at this LINK](#)

EXCLUSION OF BAG MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

Since its establishment in 2024, BAG has met only three times with the Joint Task Team (JTT), composed of the City of Cape Town, CapeNature, and SANParks. The first meeting in March 2025 was introductory. At the second meeting in May 2025, the JTT unilaterally announced a proposal to potentially remove more than 120 baboons, effectively erasing four to five troops from the Peninsula. This drastic measure was tabled without any consultation with BAG, undermining the very purpose for which it was created.

GGST strongly opposed the proposal and raised concerns about the absence of consultation. These objections were ignored. Public outcry was immediate: a protest in Simon's Town drew approximately 500 people; thousands signed a petition; and a memorandum was delivered to the JTT. Despite this, community voices and civil society's appeals appear to have been disregarded.

Irregular and Predetermined Processes

In July 2025, the JTT convened a panel of experts behind closed doors, allegedly under confidentiality clauses, bypassing fair and transparent selection procedures. BAG members'

requests for disclosure were ignored. At the third BAG meeting (18 August 2025), JTT presented only a secondary report from this panel, which repeated previously announced outcomes. Meaningful scrutiny of the original reports from the experts was not permitted.

The process was flawed in multiple respects:

1. The expert panel was narrowly constituted, excluding disciplines essential to baboon management and disregarding established scientific recommendations for a multidisciplinary approach.
2. Indigenous and cultural voices were marginalised, despite their deep connections to the land and wildlife. At the 18 August meeting, an Indigenous representative invited by GGST raised, through a strong statement, serious concerns about violations of Indigenous rights and the erasure of cultural heritage, but these were not taken seriously.
3. One week before the deadline for submissions, BAG members have still not been provided with an updated baboon population count, nor with the revised guidelines, which remain under review.
4. As far as we are aware, the baboon service provider, [Shark Spotters / Cape Baboon Partnership](#), has yet to publish any of its six monthly reports since its inception on 1 March 2025.
5. BAG members were given unreasonably short deadlines to consult their constituencies. Written and verbal requests for extensions were denied.
6. The general public was informed in a [purely top-down manner](#), with no invitation to get engaged in this process, either via submitting comments to the JTT or to the BAG
7. This approach has been characterised by secrecy, exclusion, unresponsiveness, and rushed decision-making. It is procedurally flawed, unjust, and undermines the integrity of participatory governance.
8. The JTT publicly claims to have consulted with welfare organisations, but we must clarify that this does not [reflect the reality of the situation](#). GGST is aware that at least 78 animal welfare organisations have formally objected, some through official letters, others through [cease and desist](#) communications, to the proposed removal of chacma baboons from the Cape Peninsula.

Governance Failures of the JTT

Since its constitution in June 2022, the JTT has repeatedly failed to uphold its responsibilities and duties, including:

Failure to Act Holistically and Effectively

1. No meaningful preventative measures to reduce urban attractants.
2. Poor enforcement of bylaws and basic waste management in baboon-populated areas.
3. Continued promotion of baboon- and penguin-populated areas as picnic sites, placing both people and wildlife at risk.
4. Failure to secure bins on penguin beaches (part of SANParks), drawing baboons into sensitive zones.
5. Neglect of meaningful stakeholder engagement, notably with the Navy, despite expert confirmation of the Navy's role in attracting baboons through poor waste management.

Exclusion of BAG and the Public

6. Drafting of the Baboon Action Plan without proper consultation.
7. Issuance of misleading media statements claiming consultation with welfare organisations, despite sidelining groups such as GGST and others.

Opaque Expert Selection

8. Appointment of the expert panel without disclosure or transparency.
9. Dismissal of repeated calls for procedural fairness.

Non-Inclusivity

10. BAG membership and the expert panel lacked cultural, racial, and Indigenous representation.
11. Indigenous voices, central to heritage and biodiversity, were marginalised.

Neglect of Multidisciplinary Scientific Advice

12. Scientific input was reduced to legitimising predetermined outcomes.

13. Root causes, urban attractants, and the need for harmonious coexistence to achieve conservation objectives remain unaddressed.

Violation of Fundamental Principles

14. The Republic of South Africa is founded on principles of participatory democracy, accountability, transparency, and public involvement, as enshrined in Chapter 1 of the Constitution. The conduct of the JTT falls far short of these standards.

While GGST fundamentally disagrees with both the process and its outcomes, we will submit formal written comments to the Plan, reserving our right to pursue further remedies.

We remain committed to advocating for ethical, science-based, inclusive, and lawful management of baboons on the Cape Peninsula.

BACKGROUND - The Deliberate Obstruction of a Community-Driven Initiative

In 2022, a small splinter group of chacma baboons, led by an alpha male later named Martello by residents, broke away from the Smitswinkel troop. This group began occupying the naval dockyard and southern parts of Simon's Town, occasionally visiting beaches such as Boulders Beach, a critical habitat for endangered African penguins. Authorities quickly raised the option of removing the troop entirely, prompting concerned residents to mobilise in response.

Between October 2023 and February 2025, residents, organised under GGST, implemented the Baboon Monitoring and Civil Coexistence Pilot Project (the Project). The initiative aimed to reduce human-baboon conflict in Simon's Town and to pioneer ethical, non-violent solutions that benefit people, wildlife, and the broader environment.

Building Solutions Together

The Project was entirely community-funded and supported by residents, shop owners, and wildlife advocates. Recognising what scientists had consistently emphasised, GGST focused heavily on waste management, the key driver of baboon incursions into town.

Collaborating with the City of Cape Town, the group helped design baboon-proof bins, launched a voluntary wet-waste food collection programme for recycling at a nearby farm, and established a recycling station. These efforts significantly reduced food attractants, drawing commendation from both the City and the media.

Results: A Cohesive, Healthy Seaforth Troop Foraging Naturally

By April 2024, the Seaforth troop had largely vacated urban areas, sleeping consistently on the mountain and frequenting sparsely populated southern areas and deserted beaches where encounters with people were rare. For nearly a year, the troop remained cohesive, calm, and displayed behaviours characteristic of a natural troop. Importantly, their physical health visibly improved, and baboons exhibited good body condition and glossy coats.

During this period, GGST developed a [Standard Operational Procedure](#), which was then shared with CapeNature, documenting effective guidelines for including the consideration of “well-being” into management practices, as required by NEM:BA amendments.

Systematic devaluation and sabotage of community efforts

Despite these successes, the Project was undermined by external pressures. With the influx of mass tourism in December 2024, encouraged by the City of Cape Town's promotions of [beach picnics in baboon and penguin habitats](#), conflicts began to rise again.

Around this time, CapeNature, a member of the JTT, acting on reports from their contracted baboon service provider, NCC, instructed GGST to apply for a hunting permit to continue the Civil Coexistence Project. This instruction was wholly inconsistent with the Project’s character, which was explicitly non-violent, non-invasive, and had nothing to do with hunting. Nevertheless, GGST was threatened with the arrest of its monitors if it failed to comply with this request. In fact, all past baboon service providers did indeed require hunting permits since they “hunted” baboons with paintballs. Apparently, the fact that we did not use aggressive deterrents did not count. Once GGST submitted the permit application, providing a detailed written account of its humane and non-aversive monitoring methods, CapeNature, the designated permitting authority, neither granted the permit nor issued a formal refusal, as required under law in cases where a permit is not granted within a timeframe. This procedural failure left GGST in legal limbo and forced the Project to come to an abrupt halt.

Without the effective monitoring of GGST, the Seaforth troop started its way back to northern areas, towards urban Simon's Town as early as March 2025.

Shark Spotters: A Shift Back to Coercive Management

At the end of December 2024, the City of Cape Town finalised arrangements with Shark Spotters, who assumed responsibility for baboon management across the Peninsula in March 2025. Within days, paintball guns were reintroduced as a primary deterrent, including in Simon's Town and against the Seaforth Troop, which Shark Spotters had, at the time of the takeover, classified as "rural" rather than "urban" therefore having an understanding that the Seaforth troop at the end of our project was indeed out of urban areas and foraging naturally.

The consequences were immediate. Within days of these violent methods being reintroduced, the Seaforth Troop returned to the naval dockyard and the urban areas of Simon's Town. This regression provided clear evidence that coercive tactics do not resolve conflict but, instead, intensify it.

Violence and Division

The Project demonstrated that peaceful, community-driven interventions can succeed when implemented holistically, with consistency, and implemented by competent monitors who care about the baboons instead of being at war against them. By contrast, violent management strategies, such as paintballing baboons, educating the public into fear by framing [indigenous wildlife](#) as enemies, collecting unverified reports of "attacks," and encouraging the public to misidentify or misreport baboon locations and behaviour, have not only failed but also sown deep division within the community. In this climate, neighbours turn against one another, dissenting voices are silenced through intimidation, and fear escalates into hostility. These approaches fuel abuse, conflict, and mistrust. Yet, instead of questioning how to

resolve conflict responsibly and ethically, through education and implementation of bylaws, authorities continue to neglect their fundamental duties and choose to remedy by introducing quick-fix, outdated, controversial, oppressive strategies that are unacceptable in a democracy.

Duty of Care and Legal Obligations

The [White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity](#), published in June 2023, emphasises the responsibility of humans to adopt and integrate conservation approaches that align with the principles of *Ubuntu*. This principle entails recognising the interdependence of humans, nature, and spiritual elements, and fostering relationships of respect and care. Objective 2 of the White Paper further underscores “dignity, compassion, and social cooperation,” explicitly affirming the intrinsic value of animals.

Developed over four years, the White Paper is intended to guide all national policies and legislation. It establishes a *duty of care* in biodiversity management, requiring decision-makers to “avoid, minimise or remedy adverse impacts on biodiversity” while also “considering the interests of the animal” and its “well-being.”

Complementing this policy, the amendments to the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEM:BA), which came into effect in June 2023, define animal well-being as a central objective of the Act. Section 2 of NEM:BA defines well-being as “the ability to cope with the environment and a state that supports the animal’s physical, physiological, and mental health, and overall quality of life.” This definition requires management practices to look beyond population control or human convenience, demanding instead that the quality of life of animals, both individually and collectively, is taken into account.

In light of these developments, outdated plans and tools that ignore well-being, focusing solely on human priorities, imposed boundaries, or violent deterrents, can no longer be justified. Methods such as paintballing baboons or lethally targeting healthy alpha males belong to the past. Current law requires a more sophisticated approach: one that considers mitigation measures, holistic interventions, ecological context, rehabilitation, species-specific needs, and compassionate, integrative solutions that advance well-being in practice.

Yet, despite this clear legal and policy direction, the existing baboon management framework has remained unchanged for decades. Authorities continue to promote outdated methods and cruel practices that prioritise elimination over coexistence, while showing little evidence

of adapting to recent legislative requirements. This persistence raises a fundamental question: why, in the face of binding national policy and law, does such an outdated approach endure?

Equally concerning is the erosion of democratic principles in public engagement. Consultative processes have often involved the manipulation of dissenting parties and the selective exclusion of critical perspectives. Community-driven initiatives offering viable, non-violent solutions have been dismissed, undermined, or actively suppressed. This not only weakens efforts to build effective and ethical management but also contradicts the constitutional principles of participatory democracy, inclusivity, and accountable governance.

South African law is clear: NEMA, NEM:BA, and the White Paper collectively impose a *duty of care* in wildlife management. This requires treating baboons with respect, safeguarding their welfare and well-being, and recognising both species-level and individual interests.

Indigenous perspectives and rights must also be included in conservation processes. However, rather than embodying this holistic, legally required approach, current management remains narrowly driven by a predetermined agenda of “problem elimination,” coupled with the manipulation of public opinion and intimidation of affected communities.

The gap between South Africa’s progressive legal framework and its on-the-ground implementation in baboon management is stark. Unless this disconnect is addressed, authorities will continue to perpetuate conflict, mistrust, and harm, contrary to the very principles of law, policy, and ethics they are mandated to uphold.

FUELLING FEAR

Constructing Flawed Narratives to Justify the Unjustifiable

In May 2022, the City of Cape Town (CoCT) launched the [Living Alongside Wildlife Charter](#) (WildCT), a progressive initiative promising to protect urban wildlife and reduce human-wildlife conflict. The Charter committed to preventative measures, public education, better waste management, traffic calming, stronger law enforcement, and a holistic, non-lethal approach to biodiversity management. These principles were later echoed in the [Baboon](#)

[Strategic Management Plan 2023/24–2033/34](#), positioning Cape Town as a city embracing wildlife-friendly planning and participatory governance.

Two years later, these promises remain largely unfulfilled. Baboons face removals and mass killings as the most viable solution, following years of confinement to degraded habitats with shrinking forage. With insufficient natural resources, baboons are forced to seek high-calorie food in urban areas, intensifying encounters with people and fuelling tensions.

This trajectory is deeply contradictory: while the City was internationally recognised in 2024 as a “[Beacon City](#)” for compassionate animal management, it now advances mass lethal removals as the principal strategy for managing wildlife in transformed landscapes.

Political Expediency Disguised as Necessity

The shift towards coercive removals is not an unavoidable reaction to conflict. It reflects systemic failures to implement preventative measures and to enforce existing legal obligations, particularly regarding waste management and traffic control.

To justify lethal removals, authorities have recently crafted narratives built on scientifically questionable claims. These include:

Troop Splintering as Abnormal

Authorities argue that smaller groups led by “[lower-ranking](#)” males or females indicate social dysfunction. In reality, troop fission is a natural phenomenon in baboon societies. The four so-called “splinter troops” now targeted for removal have shown remarkable resilience, surviving wildfires and sustained human pressures.

In primatology, the scientifically accurate term to describe the division of a troop into two or more subgroups is fission. ***Fission is a well-documented***, natural behavioural and ecological phenomenon that occurs across primate species, including baboons. It reflects the adaptive capacity of social groups to respond to pressures such as resource availability, population density, or internal dynamics. Crucially, fission is not considered a pathological or undesirable event; rather, it is a normal and expected feature of primate social organisation.

By contrast, the term ***“Splinter Troop” is a manufactured label*** that carries negative connotations, framing natural behaviour as a “problem” and pathologising certain baboons as undesirable. In particular, management authorities have applied the term in ways that suggest these groups consist of “low-ranking” or “inadequate” males and females, an assertion that has no scientific basis. This framing is deeply misleading because it constructs a false narrative of deviance or deficiency, which in turn is used to justify invasive or lethal interventions.

It is therefore essential to use the correct scientific terminology. Referring to these events as “fission” not only aligns with established primatological knowledge but also prevents the distortion of language into a tool for marginalising or delegitimising the lives of wild baboons.

Hair Loss as Evidence of Ill-Health

Officials present hair loss as proof of declining health among baboons, yet no scientific evidence has been disclosed to support this claim. Stress hormone analyses, which could clarify the causes, remain unpublished. Existing research links hair loss to chronic stress, plausibly induced by management practices such as paintballing. Community members have documented repeated paintball use against females with infants, raising serious welfare and ethical concerns.

Misleading Risk Narratives

Authorities further amplify fear by framing baboons as threats to public health and biodiversity:

- ***Swine Flu***: At the last Baboon Advisory Group meeting, officials suggested that reducing baboon populations could somehow prevent or pre-empt swine flu transmission to humans. We submit that this claim is disingenuous, scientifically unsound, and entirely speculative, an unsubstantiated scenario bordering on fear-mongering.

- ***Penguin Conservation:*** Baboons are portrayed as endangering African penguins. While baboons may occasionally and naturally startle penguins, there is no evidence of impacts. Research consistently shows that penguin declines are driven by anthropogenic activities, including overfishing, climate change, and anthropogenic noise, as well as specific naval activities, which include the military exercises by the Navy in Simon's Town. In reality, tourism, dogs, and even the occasional bee attack have proven to be more direct threats to penguins than baboons.
- ***Habituation ... or not?*** Authorities promote the narrative that alpha males pose a threat to people in Simon's Town. Simultaneously, they claim that baboons are overly habituated to urban areas and humans. Together, these conflicting narratives are being used to justify the elimination of alpha males and their troops.

The triple planetary crisis, affecting us also at the local level, is climate change, pollution, and biodiversity collapse. The triple planetary crisis is NOT baboons, diseases from baboons, and attacks by baboons. In our view, fear is used here as a governance tool.

This strategy distracts from evidence-based threats and doable solutions that have been negligently neglected. This crafted strategy is irresponsible; it deepens as a result community divisions, perpetuates harmful practices that affect people and devastate the environment and our future. Ultimately, it legitimises violence, cruel, and illegal practices.

IRREGULAR AND UNLAWFUL SELECTION OF EXPERT PANELLISTS

A further concern is the Joint Task Team's highly irregular choice of external expertise.

In South Africa, the establishment of expert panels by government departments or public entities is expected to follow principles present in constitutional and administrative law.

These principles are not optional; they form the foundation of legitimate, fair, and transparent public decision-making.

At the heart of this framework is [Section 195](#) of the Constitution, which outlines the values governing public administration. These include five crucial elements: transparency, accountability, fairness, responsiveness, and public participation, as well as the requirement for ethical and professional conduct. Any process initiated by a public authority, including the appointment of an expert panel, must reflect these constitutional values. A failure to do so is not simply poor practice; it is inconsistent with the fundamental expectations of public governance in a democratic State.

This is reinforced by the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA) of 2000, which gives legal effect to the constitutional right to just administrative action. [PAJA, s 33](#), stipulates that all administrative decisions must be lawful, reasonable, and procedurally fair. It requires that affected parties are allowed to be heard, that reasons for decisions are provided, and that such decisions are open to judicial review (accountability). When an expert panel is constituted to advise on or influence decisions, such as those relating to the management or removal of wildlife, its formation and operation must adhere strictly to these legal requirements.

The JTT, as currently constituted, is not a legally accountable entity. It is not a statutory body, government department, or registered legal entity, but rather an inter-agency agreement between parties. As such, it lacks formal legal standing, defined governance structures, and public accountability mechanisms. In light of this, ***it is inappropriate for the JTT to initiate or lead the establishment of a panel of experts***, particularly on matters as serious and impactful as the proposed removal of hundreds of baboons from the Cape Peninsula.

Furthermore, for a panel of experts to be selected and established, government bodies are compelled to follow a structured and transparent process, particularly when the decisions to be informed by such panels carry environmental, social, or ethical weight.

The first step is [a public announcement of intention](#). A government department or agency must publicly declare its intention to establish an expert advisory panel. The announcement usually outlines the issue at hand, defines the nature of expertise required, such as ecological, legal, social science, welfare, etc., and sets out the preliminary terms of reference for the panel.

Following this, the government body will issue a public call for nominations or submissions of CVs. This step is crucial, as it allows for the broad participation of qualified professionals and institutions. Interested individuals or organisations are invited to submit their credentials, along with statements of independence, non-conflictual interests, expertise, and motivations for participation.

Once submissions of CVs are received, the government proceeds with the evaluation and appointment of panel members. Selection is typically carried out by a review committee within government, using clear criteria such as professional expertise and absence of conflicts of interest. Those selected are then formally appointed, and their names and institutional affiliations are published for public scrutiny.

Upon appointment, the panel is provided with a clearly defined Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR outlines the panel's scope and objectives, the timeline for their work, methodological expectations, and ethical standards. It also sets out the deliverables expected from the panel, typically including a detailed report, findings, and evidence-based recommendations.

No proper steps have been followed.

The panel of experts ***has been selected behind closed doors without any opportunity for broader scientific or public participation.*** The process lacked transparency, failed to invite multi-disciplinary input (as required by the complex socio-ecological nature of baboon management), and excluded key stakeholders.

As UCT scientist [Dr Bently Kaplan](#) has emphasised in [his PHD on the chacma baboons](#) and human conflict on the Cape Peninsula, ***managing baboon populations requires the integration of multiple fields, including anthropology, sociology,***

animal behaviour, welfare science, conservation biology, psychology, ethics, and urban planning, among others. The selection of a narrow, secretive expert panel is wholly inadequate and procedurally unacceptable.

Further, we were informed that the selected experts were given only a few working days to produce their assessments, an unreasonably short period given the gravity and complexity of the issue, and to inform a decision that will irreversibly affect entire troops of sentient beings and the communities living alongside them.

To compound these concerns, we highlight that the JTT failed to share with the BAG members:

- a. copies of expert reports. Instead, the JTT has compiled a second-layer report based on these expert submissions;
- b. updated population count;
- c. updated and legally compliant management guidelines (the missing Appendix K in the Action Plan), which include lethal practices and standards;
- d. the last 11 months baboon service provider's reports (NCC's last published report was in August 2024, and Shark Spotters / Cape Baboon Partnership never published monthly reports from its inception 6 months ago. This is particularly interesting for GGST because the reports might contain data on the Seaforth troop that we could easily verify.

On 28 July, GGST and SAFCEI, both BAG members, [formally requested procedural rectification](#) from the JTT, in particular:

- a. to restore integrity and fairness to this process;
- b. to follow South African governmental procedures for constituting an expert advisory panel. This includes:
 - i. appointing one JTT member as the government body to run the process of selecting the panel of experts. This body cannot be an *agreement* and must exist in law to grant accountability;

- ii. the body must publicly announce the intent to form a panel of experts and define a multidisciplinary scope of expertise;
 - iii. inviting CVs and statements of interest from the public and academic institutions;
 - iv. disclosing the selected panellists and allowing for public comment;
 - v. allocating adequate time for research, consultation, and deliberation.
- c. Scientific claims used to support proposed management interventions should be accompanied by peer-reviewed publications or ethically approved research (e.g., UCT ethics clearance numbers). The use of “science” in public decision-making and proposed actions must meet the standards of academic transparency and ethical accountability.
- d. Once expert reports are released, the BAG and wider community should be given sufficient time to review and comment.

SELECTED USE OF SCIENCE

The fact that proper waste management is critical to reducing the presence of Chacma baboons in urban areas is consistent with science. Dr Bentley Kaplan specialised in human-wildlife conflict as a PhD researcher in the Department of Zoology at the University of Cape Town under Professor Justin O’Riain. His focus was on the Cape Peninsula Chacma baboon. His multi-disciplinary research integrates behavioural ecology, cognition, and learning theory with practical conflict mitigation strategies. Kaplan also concluded that the “baboon problem” [is a human problem](#). **Kaplan research is accessible [at this LINK](#)**

Kaplan’s work combines extensive literature review, field-based behavioural observation, and data analysis to explore innovative, evidence-based approaches for “harmonious cohabitation” with wildlife.

The top findings of his research (2009 to 2013) are:

- Waste management and enforcement of bylaws are top priorities in conflict mitigation.

- Solutions for “harmonious cohabitation” primarily lie in education.
- City of Cape Town’s baboon-proof bins were effective, if used properly, to restrict baboon access to waste.
- The Namibian method (tailored provisioning) showed how to successfully lead troops away from populated areas near Simon’s Town. Provisioning is indeed an effective short-term solution suitable for emergencies, to keep baboons out of urban areas. Provisioning only worked when large waste areas were closed down, highlighting the role of waste access in troop behaviour.
- The consistent use of rangers is a very expensive strategy and shows variable success.
- The use of rangers and deterrents significantly affects natural baboon behaviour.
- Baboons do not like humans or urban spaces; they are purely motivated by food.
- Urban landscapes should be modified with wildlife in mind, with effective bylaws to prevent people from attracting baboons.
- It is essential to integrate research disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social anthropology, behavioural economics, and policy.
- Most affected residents do not support lethal control methods. Despite localised intolerance, findings indicated a high level of tolerance for baboons among residents.

INCOMPLETE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE BAG

We did not receive from the JTT crucial information such as:

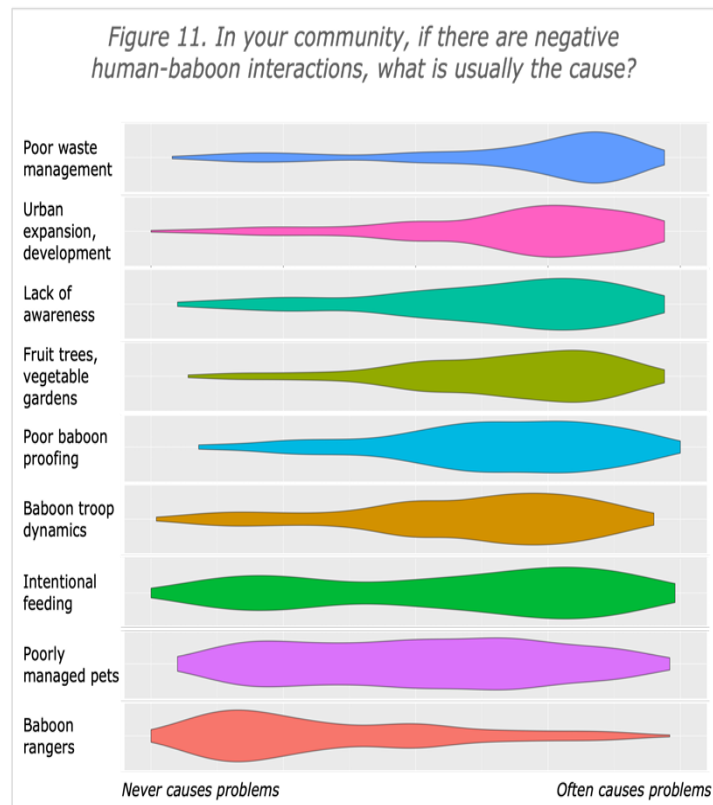
- The missing Appendix K in the Baboon Action Plan Guidelines (which include lethal measures): Once again, developed behind closed doors
- Updated Population Count
- Shark Spotters’ Monthly reports

FAILED COMPETENCIES

Waste management

Poor waste management is recognised as the leading cause of baboons entering urban areas, also by [Unruly Natures](#), Stockholm University's two-year research. This study meaningfully examines urban human-wildlife coexistence. Based on interviews with over 500 residents, it explores perceptions of baboons as both troublesome and charming, and how people adapt to living alongside them. Surprisingly, a small

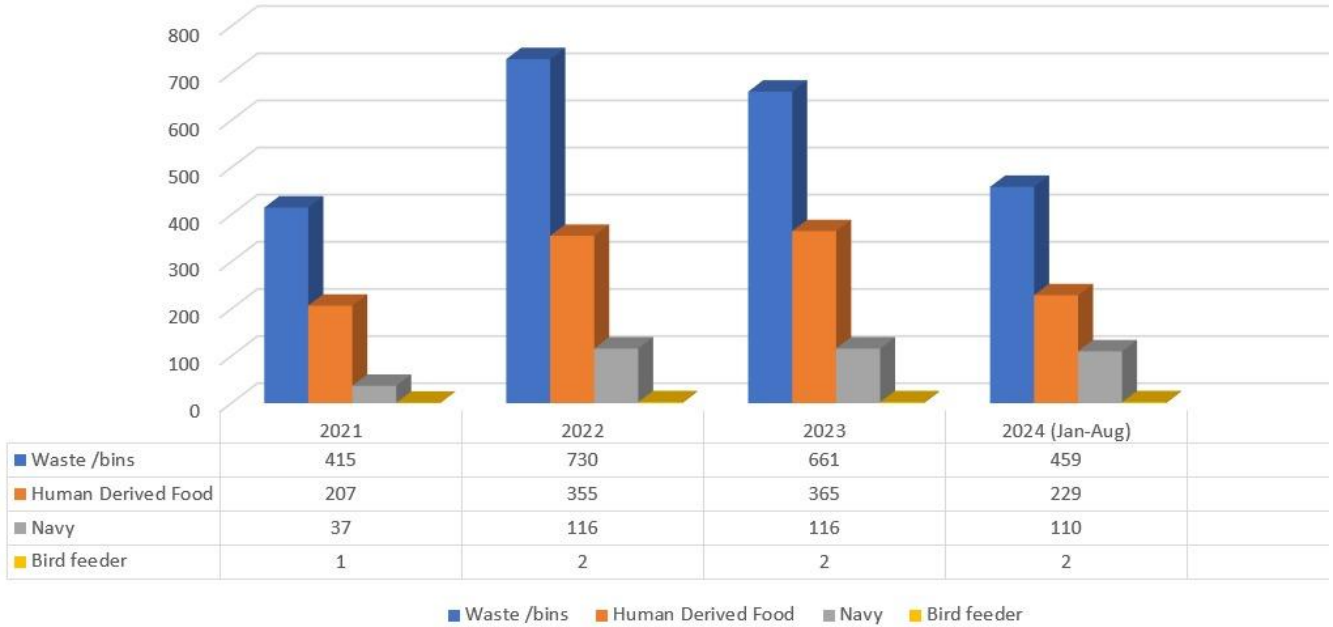
percentage of residents (only about 1/4) said they would prefer that baboons did not enter their neighbourhood. Most did not want them inside their homes, which is understandable, but the tolerance for them in urban areas was relatively high. Notably, most residents did not like baboons being killed; they wanted more education for residents, they thought poor waste management was the key problem, and they wanted to keep or ideally increase the number of baboon rangers/monitors.



Credit: [Unruly Natures, Stockholm University research: Awareness, attitudes, and action in environmental stewardship for a better relationship between two urban primates](#)

We have reviewed the reports of the former service provider, NCC, covering their four years of work on the Cape Peninsula. A consistent theme across all reports is the central importance of waste management in reducing human–baboon conflict. NCC repeatedly emphasised that poor waste management directly attracts baboons into urban areas, making it a primary driver of conflict. To illustrate the extent of this emphasis, a word count search revealed more than 730 references to waste management and related attractants, often accompanied by clear recommendations for improvement. Despite this consistent evidence, the responsible authorities failed to implement these recommendations in any meaningful way. The extract below reflects how NCC repeatedly highlighted waste management as a critical issue.

**Keywords Focus Chart: Focus themes in NCC's Cape Peninsula
Baboon Management Reports
Years 2021 to 2024**



Analysis from NCC Baboon Urban Programme Monthly Reports 2021-2024

OVERLOOKING THE HERITAGE AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

An indigenous Voice – Chad Cupido - Gorachouqua Tribe Cape City

At the BAG meeting on the 18 August an Indigenous Voice read this poem to the JTT. The Video of Chad Cupido reading his poem is [accessible at this link](#)

Whose Mountain Speaks?

***Whose mountain is this, rock or kin?
A lifeless stone, or life within?
Is it soil to exploit, or ancestor’s breath?
A sacred protector, or a sentence of death?***

***Whose voices count when panels are picked?
Why were killers of predators the ones you select?
Where are the healers, the carers, the wise?
Why close the doors, why silence the cries?***

***You call this the JTT, but where is the trust?
When the process is broken, when it crumbles to dust?***

*When secrecy rules and inclusion is blocked,
Is this lawful governance, or justice mocked?*

*Our Constitution is clear, our White Paper too,
Biodiversity's future demands what is true.
ILO 169 makes it binding in law,
Indigenous voices must guide what you saw.*

*Yet Ocean View cries, a community betrayed,
Expropriated from Simon's Town, their history weighed.
Now baboons face erasure, their kin pushed away,
With no consultation, how is this okay?*

*We marched in Simon's Town, five hundred strong.
Mothers, elders, children, a thunderous song.
Did you hear us then, or turn away?
Do our voices mean nothing on that fateful day?*

*Look abroad, New Zealand, the Andes, the seas.
Rivers and forests given legal personhood, rights, and dignity.
While South Africa stalls, stuck in denial,
The world moves forward, mile by mile.*

*And what of Wendy, the baboon with the chain?
A collar that binds her to silence and pain.
If she were human, would you wait and delay?
Or would you free her without one more day?*

*We are Indigenous, we are still here.
Our law is the land, our message is clear.
You cannot erase us, you cannot pretend,
That this process is fair, or that justice will bend.*

*The law will prevail, the truth will remain,
Our heritage, our mountain, will not be in vain.
So hear this today: we are not going away.
Not tomorrow, not next year, we are here, we will stay.*

*You have lost the plot, so we will not stop until we win.
So I end with the Indigenous chant:
"Seeda Seeda Gerra Chwa Chwa",
Which means: "Let us begin."*

Baboons as Ecological Engineers

Chacma baboons are not only intelligent and socially complex animals, but also **keystone species** whose ecological role in the Cape Peninsula's fynbos biome is profound and still not fully understood. For over two million years, they have shaped this landscape, influencing plant regeneration, soil health, and biodiversity. Their daily activities, feeding, foraging, moving, and interacting with the land, act as essential ecological processes that sustain the resilience of the ecosystem.

Seed Dispersal and Germination

Baboons are the **primary seed dispersers** in the Cape Peninsula. By carrying seeds in their stomachs and depositing them across large distances, they:

1. Increase local genetic diversity of plant species.
2. Enhance germination rates by breaking down seed coats during digestion.
3. Improve seed survival by protecting them through the digestive process.

This constant seed movement maintains the richness and diversity of the fynbos.

Ecosystem Engineering

Through digging, overturning rocks, and foraging, baboons physically reshape the environment in ways that benefit countless other organisms. Their actions:

1. Aerate and loosen soils, increasing oxygen and nutrient circulation.
2. Create microhabitats where wind-blown seeds can establish.
3. Influence slope stability and landscape evolution through rock displacement.
4. Support invertebrate communities by modifying local habitats.

In effect, baboons act as engineers, creating living conditions that extend beyond their own needs.

Food Acquisition and Nutrient Cycling

Baboons play a key role in **nutrient cycling** and food-web dynamics. Their foraging behaviour:

1. Exposes invertebrates, an important protein source, for themselves and other species.
2. Increases soil fertility by mixing organic matter into the ground.
3. Makes plant parts and seeds accessible to smaller animals that cannot dig or break tough vegetation.

Pollination and Plant Facilitation

While not traditionally recognised as pollinators, baboons contribute by:

1. Transferring pollen on their hands, faces, and fur as they feed.
2. Breaking open plants, indirectly assisting smaller species in accessing food.
3. Promoting seed germination and plant regrowth, especially after fires.

Ecological Role After Fires

In fire-adapted fynbos landscapes, baboons are critical to ecosystem recovery. In recently burned areas they:

1. Feed on exposed seeds and underground storage organs.
2. Consume plants at different regrowth stages, influencing successional dynamics.
3. Accelerate the recycling of nutrients, helping the fynbos recover more quickly.

Why Their Role Matters

Baboons' ecological contributions make them **indispensable to the long-term health and resilience of the fynbos ecosystem**. Their activities sustain plant diversity, promote soil vitality, and create conditions for countless other species to thrive. To lose baboons from the Cape Peninsula would not only mean the disappearance of a sentient and socially complex species but would also unravel vital ecological processes that maintain one of the world's most unique and biodiverse regions.

Bonds and Relationships

Chacma baboons are highly social and emotionally complex beings who live in close-knit troops bound together by strong relationships. They express affection through grooming, playing, cuddling, and other forms of gentle interaction. Grooming is one of their most

important social behaviours: while it serves the practical purpose of removing parasites and dirt, its deeper significance lies in the way it builds trust, reduces tension, and strengthens bonds within the troop. Grooming stimulates the release of endorphins, the body's natural "feel-good" chemicals, promoting calm, comfort, and emotional well-being. These shared moments of care are central to troop cohesion and demonstrate the depth of baboon relationships.

Cognition, Sentience, Friendships and Emotional Lives

Chacma baboons are intelligent, adaptable, social and sentient beings. They use tools, such as rocks and sticks, to access food or examine their bodies. Their behaviour reflects a wide emotional range, including joy, empathy, fear, grief, and playfulness. For example, when mothers lose their infants, they often mourn visibly for days or even weeks, carrying the body and showing signs of profound sadness. Such responses highlight their capacity for emotional depth and empathy. Baboons communicate in complex ways, through vocalisations, gestures, and facial expressions, demonstrating sophisticated social awareness and problem-solving abilities.

Parenting and Care

Parenting among chacma baboons is strikingly devoted and protective. Mothers nurture their infants with constant attention, carrying them close, nursing them, grooming them, and keeping them safe. They care for injured infants with remarkable patience and perseverance, often helping them recover fully. Males, too, play an important role in parenting: many form strong protective bonds with infants, grooming them, playing gently, and even carrying them on their backs. Parents actively teach their young social boundaries, foraging skills, and safety within the troop. This shared care reflects a deep commitment to the well-being and survival of their offspring.

Communication and Behavioural Complexity in Baboons

Chacma baboons are highly expressive, both vocally and behaviourally. Their communication repertoire reflects their intelligence, social sophistication, and ability to adapt to the challenges of group living in dynamic environments. Far from being random or instinctive,

their signals, whether vocal, visual, or tactile, are carefully attuned to context, shaping social bonds, resolving conflict, and ensuring survival.

Vocal Communication

Baboons communicate through an extensive range of vocalisations, each carrying a specific meaning. Their calls span from soft grunts and murmurs used in close social contexts to sharp, bark-like alarm calls that can ripple through the troop when a threat is detected. These alarm calls—staccato bursts often described as "hah-hah-hah" barks- serve to alert others, trigger vigilance, and coordinate group movement under threat.

Grunts and growls often arise during moments of tension, reflecting agitation, defensiveness, or low-level aggression, particularly in competitive feeding or dominance interactions. Conversely, higher-pitched chirps and squeaks serve as contact calls, keeping individuals connected in dense vegetation or expressing excitement and playfulness.

Male “wahoo” calls are among the most iconic vocalisations. Deep and resonant, these long-distance calls communicate strength, dominance, and location, broadcasting an individual’s presence to rivals and allies alike. These powerful vocal signals play a critical role in male-male competition and in maintaining troop cohesion across landscapes.

Non-Verbal Signals and Aggression

HOW MARTELLO IS ACTUALLY AN EXCELLENT ALPHA MALE

Baboons are also masters of non-verbal communication. Posture, gesture, and expression often speak louder than sound. A hard, direct stare may serve as an unmistakable challenge, while piloerection (hair standing on end) amplifies perceived size, projecting strength in the face of rivals or predators. Tooth-baring, ground-slapping, and lunging are dramatic visual displays designed to intimidate and deter without escalating to actual combat.

These behaviours serve an important ecological and social function: they minimise injury while maintaining the integrity of dominance hierarchies that structure troop life. In this way, baboon aggression is not mindless violence but a finely tuned form of negotiation within complex social systems.

Affiliative, Playful, and Curious Behaviours

Equally central to baboon life are affiliative behaviours that maintain harmony and cohesion. Grooming is the cornerstone of these relationships, serving both hygienic and emotional purposes. By carefully picking through each other's fur, baboons reduce parasite loads, while simultaneously building trust, relieving tension, and reinforcing alliances that may later determine support in conflicts.

Play, especially among juveniles, is another essential behaviour. Far more than simple entertainment, play strengthens social bonds, develops motor skills, and teaches young baboons the boundaries of dominance and submission. Adults also engage in playful or gentle interactions, which help diffuse tension and sustain bonds.

Curiosity is another defining trait. Baboons explore their environment with a sense of investigative intelligence, sniffing, manipulating objects, experimenting with food sources, and even using stones or sticks as rudimentary tools. Such behaviours highlight their capacity for social learning, where younger individuals observe and imitate older, more experienced troop members.

Behavioural Roles in Group Survival

Certain behaviours reflect not only individual intelligence but also a deep commitment to group well-being. Sentinel behaviour, where one baboon perches in a high position to scan for predators, ensures safety for the troop while others forage or rest. This role demonstrates cooperation and the prioritisation of group security over individual needs.

Foraging, too, showcases their ecological adaptability. Baboons dig, turn rocks, and probe vegetation in ways that reshape the environment, while simultaneously teaching younger troop members how to exploit diverse food sources. Through these behaviours, baboons reveal themselves as ecosystem engineers, knowledge carriers, and cooperative beings.

Why Behavioural Complexity Matters

The behavioural repertoire of baboons, ranging from vocal calls and visual displays to play, curiosity, and caregiving, reflects their status as **sentient, socially intelligent, and ecologically**

significant beings. Their communication systems and behavioural strategies not only ensure survival in a challenging environment but also sustain the complex social fabric of their troops. Recognising this richness is essential to appreciating who baboons are: emotionally intelligent, behaviourally sophisticated, and vital members of the ecosystems they inhabit.

Understanding Baboons' Needs

Baboons flourish in environments where their needs for safety, food, water, and social interaction are respected. They are curious, playful, and resourceful animals who enjoy foraging, exploring, and engaging in lively play with troop members. Their joy is found in the comfort of family bonds, the security of cohesive groups, and the freedom to express their natural behaviours. When they are allowed to live without threat, baboons reveal themselves as intelligent, emotional, and socially rich beings whose lives are defined by care, connection, and resilience.

Personalities: Why Understanding Individual Baboons Matters

Naming Individuals

In primatology, some of the most influential researchers, most notably Jane Goodall in her long-term study of chimpanzees and Dian Fossey in her work with mountain gorillas, introduced the practice of naming individuals. This marked a departure from the convention of using numbers or codes. Naming was not merely symbolic: it acknowledged that each primate was a unique individual with a distinct behavioural profile, personality, and social role within the group.

This practice has scientific as well as ethical significance. By recognising individuality, researchers are better able to observe and interpret complex behaviours such as alliance formation, friendships, maternal strategies, dominance interactions, and reconciliation. Identifying individuals by name allows for the tracking of life histories over years and even decades, thereby advancing understanding of primate cognition, social complexity, and cultural transmission.

At the same time, naming is an act of ethical recognition. A baboon identified as “Martello” proposed as a Wise King in a book, or as “Lefty,” a tripod but strong mother, or, “Kataza”

whose ordeal made headlines, is no longer an anonymous data point but a subject of life whose individuality demands acknowledgement. This contrasts sharply with the treatment of primates in biomedical laboratories and exploitative or violent management systems, where animals are intentionally anonymised through codes or numbers. Such de-individualisation reduces sentient beings to laboratory or field experimental units, facilitating practices that would be more difficult to justify if their individuality were recognised.

Extending the practice of naming to wild baboons thus carries both scientific value and moral weight. It affirms their sentience, highlights their personalities, and enables rigorous long-term behavioural research. Equally, it challenges the epistemic frameworks that enable their objectification and mistreatment. Just as Goodall and Fossey transformed scientific and public perceptions of great apes by foregrounding individuality, a similar shift in the study and management of baboons **could indeed promote deeper understanding, respect, and the development of more ethical coexistence strategies.**

The Failure of Paintball Guns in Baboon Management- Empirical Observation

The use of paintball guns as a baboon management tool is outdated and inconsistent with South African law, particularly section 2 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA) and its 2023 Amendments. These amendments require that all management interventions consider animal well-being and ensure that negative effects on biodiversity are minimised. The continued use of paintballs, despite overwhelming evidence of their harmful effects, is therefore not only ethically indefensible but also legally non-compliant.

Physical Harm

Paintball shots can cause direct and severe physical harm. The most serious risk is permanent blindness, as the eyes are exceptionally vulnerable to high-velocity impact. Documented cases have recorded baboons left permanently blinded, with paint marks near the eyes of juveniles, lactating females, and elderly individuals. Other injuries include lacerations, bruising, internal bleeding, and lasting tissue damage, particularly when individuals are repeatedly targeted.

Such practices are cruel and incompatible with the principle of well-being enshrined in NEM:BA.

Psychological and Behavioural Impacts

Beyond physical harm, paintball use causes long-term psychological damage. Repeated exposure induces chronic stress and anxiety, altering natural behaviour and troop cohesion. Baboons subjected to such stress may become hyper-vigilant, defensive, or aggressive, disrupting their ability to forage, lead, or care for infants effectively.

Stress-related breakdown of social hierarchies can destabilise troop leadership, weaken bonds, and trigger intra-troop violence. Lactating females under prolonged stress may experience reduced milk production and diminished maternal care, with knock-on effects for infant survival. Chronic stress also weakens immune systems, making baboons more vulnerable to disease.

Ineffectiveness of Paintball Deterrents

From a management perspective, paintball guns fail to deliver sustainable results. Baboons demonstrate habituation, reducing their responsiveness to deterrents even when they are harmful. As a result, managers escalate force without addressing the underlying ecological drivers of conflict, leaving baboons harmed and communities frustrated.

This ineffectiveness is compounded by the fact that disrupted foraging behaviour drives baboons toward human food sources, precisely the outcome managers seek to avoid. Instead of restoring ecological functioning, paintball use entrenches dependency on human-derived, high-calorie foods, exacerbating conflict.

Negative Impacts on Tourism and Communities

Beyond ecological harm, paintball use carries social and reputational costs. Images of cruelty and violence towards baboons damage South Africa's reputation for conservation and ecotourism. Communities associated with such practices risk being perceived as cruel or incompetent in managing wildlife, undermining both trust and tourism revenue.

Legal and Ethical Non-Compliance

Under NEM:BA and its 2023 amendments, management strategies must:

- Incorporate animal well-being as a legal requirement.
- Avoid practices that cause unnecessary suffering.
- Minimise biodiversity impacts through science-based, ecologically sound interventions.

Paintball use fails on all these counts. Its continuation represents a breach of both the spirit and the letter of South African biodiversity law.

Demonstrated Failure

Years of reliance on paintball deterrents have conclusively shown that this approach fails—not only in Simon’s Town but wherever it has been applied in South Africa. The strategy neither resolves human–baboon conflict nor protects ecological integrity. Instead, it entrenches cycles of violence, stress, and ecological imbalance, contrary to the requirements of law, ethics, and science.

THE BABOON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN AND “CULLING”

Genetic Bottleneck Concerns

At the BAG meeting of 18 August 2025, members expressed serious concern regarding the potential genetic consequences of removing between 100 and 200 baboons from the Cape Peninsula population, currently estimated at approximately 600 individuals. Such a reduction represents a significant proportion of the total population and would have immediate and long-term implications for genetic viability. There was a session where all members brainstormed about **genetic enrichment** in the event of a cull.

GGST questions if we are setting the Cape Peninsula Baboon population for genetic collapse.

The Cape Peninsula constitutes a geographically and ecologically isolated environment, functioning effectively as a closed system. Urbanisation has created a complete barrier around the Peninsula, preventing the natural dispersal of baboons to and from surrounding regions. This lack of connectivity means that no genetic exchange with external populations is possible, while emigration from the Peninsula typically results in mortality, as dispersing baboons are inevitably killed during conflict encounters in urban areas.

Within the Peninsula, the population is already fragmented into several troops occupying discrete ranges, further reducing opportunities for gene flow. Under these conditions, any artificial reduction of the population would exacerbate the risks of inbreeding depression, loss of genetic diversity, and long-term population decline.

During the discussion, one suggestion raised was the introduction of baboons from other parts of South Africa into the Peninsula to increase genetic variation. However, this was widely acknowledged as an ethically and ecologically problematic measure. Introducing wild baboons into an already stressed and highly urbanised environment would likely result in high mortality, maladaptation, and the rapid habituation of immigrant baboons to anthropogenic food sources, particularly if waste management deficiencies remain unresolved. Such translocations would also raise significant welfare concerns for the animals involved and could further destabilise existing social structures within resident troops.

For these reasons, the prospect of a genetic bottleneck underscores the conclusion that population reduction through removals is both scientifically irresponsible and ecologically unsustainable. A precautionary approach is required, prioritising habitat restoration, conflict mitigation, and long-term coexistence strategies, rather than drastic population reduction measures that threaten the genetic integrity and survival of the Peninsula's baboon population.

FAILED ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

The 2024 [Western Cape State of the Environment Report](#) offers a dire picture: ecosystem health continued its steady decline over the past five years. Habitat loss and species deterioration are recorded even in protected areas like Table Mountain. Drivers include

invasive species, poaching, arson, illegal trade, lack of enforcement, and poor implementation. While protected areas have expanded on paper, this has not translated into ecological recovery.

These trends expose a critical truth: formal protection without ecological restoration is not sufficient. Fragmented, ***reactive conservation is failing. We need preventative measures.***

No climate adaptation plans seem to be effectively in place.

No significant funding seems to be allocated to ecosystem repair.

Most alarmingly, legal duties remain unfulfilled: the duty of care and the obligation to consider animal well-being in management decisions are routinely ignored. Nature continues to be treated not as a living system, but as an inert object to be controlled and used.

Indigenous Wisdom and Suppressed Ecologies

Globally, Indigenous communities represent just 5% of the population, yet protect over 80% of biodiversity. In southern Africa, the San and Khoe Peoples have long held baboons in high regard. Known as beings who “[refuse to die](#),” baboons were admired for their powerful resilience and ability to heal, escape danger, overcome drought, and injury. San healers observed them closely, evoked their powers in rituals, and followed them to learn which plants they used to manage pain and heal, laying the foundation for their legendary knowledge of medicinal plants.

This empirical wisdom is grounded in generations of observation and harmonious coexistence.

Lack of an independent overview and the exclusion of scientists trained in Ethics

Given the scale and gravity of the interventions being pursued, from the use of paintball guns to the proposed mass translocation or the potential killing of 120 baboons to 200 baboons, the

absence of ethical oversight is deeply problematic. Despite repeated requests by civil society actors and academic experts in animal ethics, ***no formal ethical review process has been undertaken. Ethicists have been consistently excluded from all task teams, advisory committees, and strategic planning processes related to baboon management.***

Although welfare considerations have been intermittently acknowledged, animal welfare does not fully address the broader ethical dimensions involved in decisions about the lives, autonomy, and ecological roles of free-living, cognitively complex nonhuman primates.

These ethical questions demand rigorous, structured deliberation, especially when decisions involve irreversible outcomes such as large-scale killing or social disruption of wild troops.

It is noteworthy that research institutions in South Africa are [legally required to obtain ethical approval for any activity involving animals](#), including non-invasive procedures such as [tracking](#). Yet coercive wildlife management actions, often more disruptive and potentially lethal, proceed without equivalent ethical scrutiny. No clear justification has been offered as to why state-sanctioned management actions should be exempt from these fundamental standards of accountability.

Elisa Galgut is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, where she also lectures in philosophy. She is a member of the UCT Bioethics Centre. Her research interests include animal ethics, among other areas. She has served on several animal ethics committees at UCT and was, for a time, Chair of the university's Animal Ethics Committee, during which she played a key role in drafting the institution's policy on the ethical treatment of non-human primates.

In a [video](#), she highlights the lack of independent ethical oversight in the current management approach. The continued failure to engage an independent animal ethicist not only undermines the legitimacy of the strategy but also erodes the moral and public trust

that should guide decisions involving sentient wildlife. Ethical review must be recognised as an essential, non-negotiable element of transparent, accountable, and lawful environmental governance.

Insufficient expert representation for such a critical and controversial issue

Baboon management is not solely a matter of conflict mitigation. It intersects with numerous other domains, including biodiversity conservation, environmental education, law, bylaw enforcement, animal welfare, waste management, urban planning, legislation, and civil society engagement. Effective and lawful responses must draw on expertise from a broad range of fields, not only ecological science and behavioural management, but also environmental ethics, social sciences, public policy, and conservation law.

Absence of Cumulative Impact Assessment in a Context of Ecological Crisis

No study evaluating the cumulative impacts of mass removals in the context of climate change, habitat fragmentation, genetic isolation, human encroachment, and biodiversity decline, was provide to the BAG or public. This is alarming, especially in light of CapeNature's own *State of Biodiversity Report for the Western Cape*, which highlights a continued decline in biodiversity despite an increase in the amount of formally protected land. The discrepancy between land protection and biodiversity recovery underscores the complexity of ecological resilience and the danger of assuming that removals of wild animals are benign or reversible actions.

Research established that keystone species have a disproportionately large effect on their natural environment and play a critical role in maintaining the structure of an ecological community.

Extinction Vortex

Population viability analysis consistently demonstrates that small, isolated primate populations face exponentially increasing extinction risk below critical demographic thresholds. The effective breeding population size in primate societies typically ranges from 25-

40% of census population size. This mathematical reality places the Cape Peninsula chacma baboon metapopulation at approximately 120-194 effective breeders, dangerously close to the minimum viable population threshold for long-term persistence in large-bodied mammals.

The proposed elimination of hundreds of individuals might drive this population into the "extinction vortex" - a demographic territory from which no primate metapopulation has ever recovered.

Primates, in particular, are greatly affected by human population expansion and land alteration, particularly because of the human attitudes to primates and the [perceptions of primates as pests](#), which have negative impacts on primate conservation.

About 60% of primate species face extinction, and about 75% have declining populations due to [escalating human pressures](#). No population census has [ever been undertaken in South Africa](#). There is therefore no rigorous estimate for the size of the South African indigenous non-human primate population or their conservation status. Nor reliable estimates of population trends at national or provincial scales. SANBI itself has identified the need to ascertain [the national and regional population size](#). It is of particular concern that South Africa currently lacks a comprehensive census of the Chacma baboon (*Papio ursinus*), a species comprising at least two distinct subspecies within the country: *Papio ursinus ursinus* (the Cape Chacma), predominantly found in the Western and parts of the Eastern Cape, and *Papio ursinus griseipes*, occurring in the northern provinces. These subspecies are ecologically and genetically distinct, a fact implicitly acknowledged by conservation authorities such as CapeNature, which prohibits the translocation of Cape Peninsula baboons to other provinces for reintroduction purposes, unless sterilised.

Local genetic integrity is key

The importance of local genetic integrity and the absence, in the proposed Plan, of disaggregated population data by subspecies means that no accurate national assessment of abundance, distribution, or conservation status currently exists for either form. Consequently, the Cape Peninsula population, comprised of *Papio ursinus ursinus*, may be significantly more vulnerable than generally understood, particularly given its geographic isolation, ongoing

habitat fragmentation, and intensive human-wildlife conflict pressures. The failure to conduct a national census and to account for subspecific variation represents a critical gap in biodiversity monitoring and policy implementation.

The position of Civil Society

Persecuted species are those less charismatic fauna that are believed to be abundant. The chacma baboon ([Papio ursinus](#)) is one such animal. Negative human attitudes towards primates pose a significant barrier to effective conservation. Without public support or a shift in perception, conservation efforts for socially complex and ecologically important species like baboons will remain compromised.

It is therefore essential to promote a more informed and empathetic understanding of these species within human communities. However, it must also be recognised that **those who are directly affected by human-wildlife conflict, while important stakeholders, should not be the sole or primary decision-makers** in determining the fate of the species in question. While community consultation is crucial, conservation decisions must be guided by ecological science, ethical considerations, and long-term biodiversity objectives.

DISREGARD OF PUBLIC OPINION

The Stockholm University “Baboon Attitudes” Report

The [Unruly Natures project's](#) scientifically rigorous survey of 537 residents across the Cape Peninsula reveals overwhelming evidence contradicting elimination justifications. An overwhelming 74% of residents expressed tolerance for baboons entering their neighbourhoods, reflecting a widespread willingness to share space with these wild primates. Only 5% of respondents supported the complete removal of baboons from the Cape Peninsula, a clear indication that eradication is not in line with public sentiment. Even among the 83% of residents who have had direct encounters with baboons, including 47% who reported baboons entering their homes, there were no reports of physical harm to humans. This suggests that, contrary to some narratives, baboons are not inherently aggressive or dangerous in urban environments. Many residents placed responsibility for negative interactions on themselves rather than the animals. Poor waste management practices and human behaviours, such as

leaving food accessible or failing to secure bins, were most often cited as the root causes of conflict.

Importantly, there was near-universal opposition to the killing or euthanising of baboons across all demographics surveyed. Instead, residents strongly supported non-lethal, community-based strategies, including expanded education initiatives and the use of trained baboon monitors to manage interactions and promote coexistence.

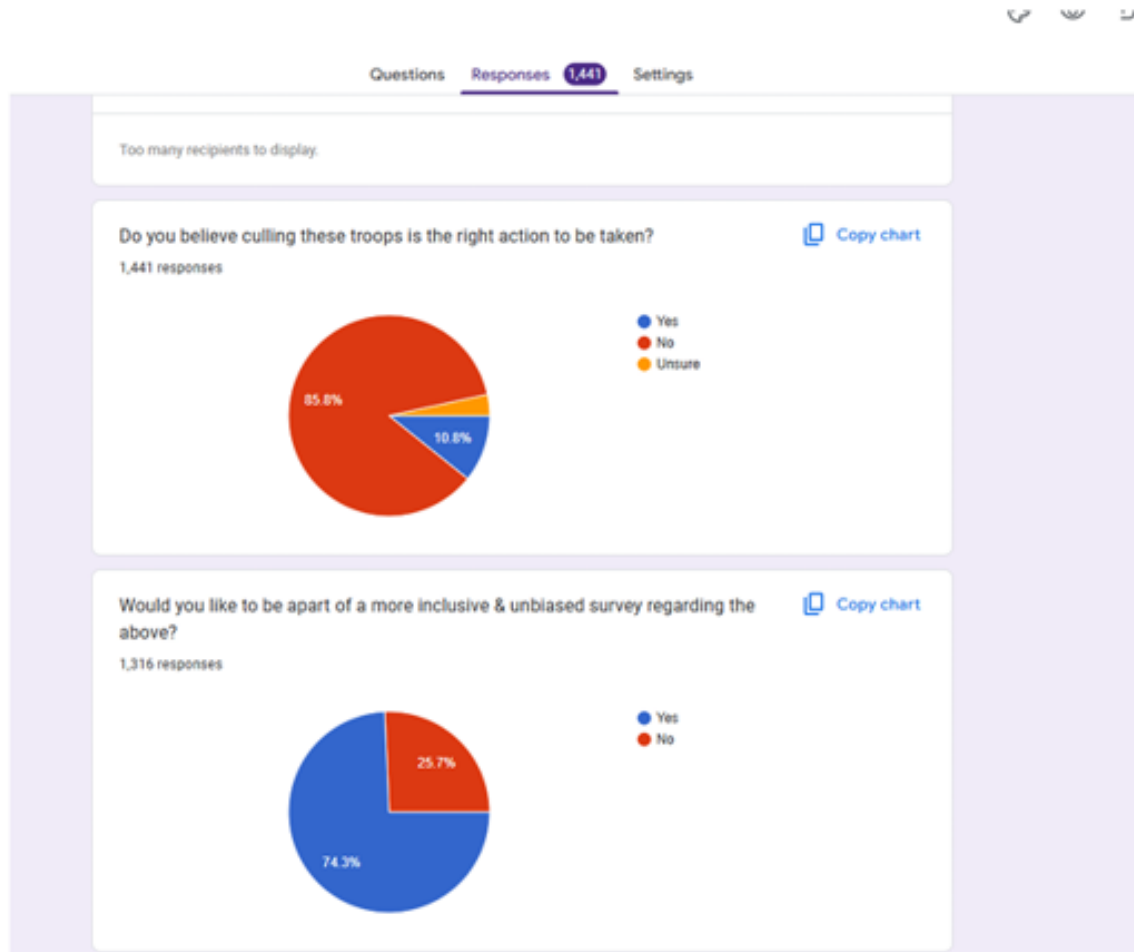
In the Western Cape, 47 registered NGOs from the Cape Animal Welfare Forum strongly opposed this proposal via [a letter](#). 28 different NGOs from the Wildlife Animals Protection Forum sent a [cease and desist letter](#). Public petitions and protest actions are currently underway as well.

These reactions indicate a significant gap between current management approaches and community values. They also underscore the urgent need for policies grounded in education, shared responsibility, rather than coercion and control.

A 48 hours survey indicated strong rejection to culling

Do you believe culling these troops is the right action to be taken?

These are the results of that poll, as of 14h45 Friday 22nd August:



Petition and Protest

Protest

[Hundreds rally in Simon's Town against proposed baboon removals](#)

Petition

7600 signatures pro non invasive solutions

[Petition · Save Our Baboons - URGENT: Stop the Planned Killing of 121 Cape Peninsula Baboons - South Africa · Change.org](#)

A premature proposal

Despite longstanding commitments, *none of the agreed-upon interventions have been meaningfully operationalised. **Notably, waste management systems remain critically deficient, with key measures, such as the rollout of baboon-proof refuse bins, deferred until 2026, despite their recognised importance.***

The role of unmanaged waste as a major attractant for baboons to urban areas is well established in both scientific literature and local precedent (including reports from NCC). Community-led initiatives demonstrate that proper waste management eliminates most negative interactions without requiring baboon elimination. Practical alternatives include [proper waste management](#) and baboon-proofing bins. Improved waste disposal systems provide immediate conflict reduction as demonstrated in [successful community programmes](#).

It is **illogical and procedurally indefensible** to proceed with the proposed removal or killing of baboons while simultaneously acknowledging that basic mitigation tools, such as secured waste infrastructure, will only be implemented in 2026. Communities have waited for the rollout of these essential measures for years, and no justification has been provided for the continued delay.

If any form of lethal control is to be considered, **it must be a measure of absolute last resort**, taken only after all non-lethal and preventive strategies have been fully exhausted and independently evaluated for efficacy. That threshold has clearly not been met in this case.

Accordingly, the proposed culling of baboons is both **premature and unacceptable**, and stands in direct conflict with the ethical, policy, and legal principles that should govern responsible and lawful wildlife management.

Given the current context, it is **premature and scientifically unjustifiable** to consider invasive interventions such as the removal or relocation of baboon troops. Authorities have **not yet exhausted foundational, non-lethal management measures**. These include the implementation of effective waste management systems and the consistent enforcement of relevant municipal bylaws. Proceeding with drastic actions in the absence of these basic interventions reflects a failure of due diligence.

Ecological buffering

Ecological buffering and wildlife corridors are both tools of landscape-scale conservation, but they serve different ecological functions. Wildlife corridors are linear or connective patches of habitat that allow animals to move between fragmented habitats. They are designed to facilitate gene flow, seasonal migration, and dispersal, often at broader spatial scales.

In contrast, ecological buffering involves the targeted restoration or enhancement of habitat adjacent to or surrounding areas of conflict (such as the urban edge), with the specific aim of reducing wildlife movement into human-dominated spaces. Buffer zones do not serve primarily as pathways but as destination habitats that fulfil animals' core biological needs, food, shelter, and safety, so that movement into undesirable zones (e.g., towns) becomes unnecessary and infrequent.

In the case of Cape baboons, buffering could take the form of strategically located indigenous food patches, reforested roosting zones, and biologically rich zones of attraction between core baboon ranges and urban edges. These vegetated buffers would act as ecological magnets, drawing animals away from towns by meeting their evolutionary and ecological requirements within their natural range.

Ecological buffering has been successfully implemented in various contexts to mitigate conflict, increase wildlife protection, and support primate and large mammal conservation. In Old Oyo National Park (Nigeria), habitat restoration supported baboons and patas monkeys by reducing their reliance on nearby farms. In Uganda's Kibale National Park, enriched buffer zones helped retain chimpanzees within forest margins. In India's Jim Corbett National Park,

passive rewilding has re-established buffer zones that both deter and absorb wildlife from agricultural and village areas.

While provisioning is not currently considered a viable management tool, it is important to recognise that environmental conditions and contextual circumstances are shifting. In regions affected by climate change and recurrent wildfires, such as the Cape Peninsula, it may be necessary to reconsider certain measures in light of ecological realities.

For instance, Addo Elephant National Park employs a system of [gradient water provisioning](#) to support elephants and other wildlife in dry areas. A similar approach could be adapted, in a cautious and context-specific manner, for areas where habitat degradation, water scarcity, or altered ecosystem dynamics pose risks to wildlife communities.

Any such intervention would require careful ecological assessment, strict safeguards to avoid habituation, and alignment with conservation and biodiversity objectives.

These examples highlight the importance of combining ecological understanding with spatial planning.

PROPOSED TRANSLOCATIONS

The capture and relocation of an entire baboon troop is **not simple not harmless**. The process is often **chaotic, physically and psychologically traumatic**, and can result in the disruption of complex social hierarchies while causing long-term stress. Baboons' well-being depends on stable group structures and familiar ecological conditions. Displacement frequently leads to **permanent captivity**, sterilisation, and a significant reduction in behavioural and reproductive freedom, which raises serious ethical and welfare concerns for these primates.

Furthermore, there are ***no clearly identified or suitable release sites that would guarantee both ecological sustainability and long-term safety for relocated troops. Sanctuaries, while often well-intentioned, may effectively function as permanent confinement, failing to meet the species-specific needs of wild primates.***

Extreme measures such as removal or euthanasia should be regarded as **measures of last resort**, permissible only after **all humane, science-based, and context-appropriate interventions have been thoroughly implemented and independently assessed**.

The practice of issuing broad, annual permits by CapeNature, authorising the [transportation](#), relocation, or [killing of baboons](#) under a blanket permit, raises serious concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and legal compliance.

Permits of this nature, which were obtained through Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) requests, effectively allow authorities to implement invasive management interventions without any opportunity for oversight or public scrutiny. This approach undermines the principles of procedural fairness, environmental justice, and the precautionary principle enshrined in South African environmental law, including the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) and its biodiversity-specific frameworks such as NEM:BA.

[Current baboon management is an example of NON-harmonious coexistence](#)

The ongoing conflict between humans and baboons on the Cape Peninsula is a striking example of ***non-harmonious coexistence***. Humanity faces a fundamental choice: to invest in frameworks that enable coexistence with wildlife, or to persist in treating other species as problems to be controlled or eliminated, an approach that ultimately undermines ecological resilience and human well-being.

The [Wild Law Institute](#) and the [EMS Foundation](#) have collaborated on advancing the concept of **Harmonious Coexistence (HC)** and its relevance to addressing contemporary challenges, including the [mitigation of climate change](#). By recognising the interdependence of species and ecosystems, HC provides a scientifically grounded and ethically coherent framework for managing human–wildlife relationships.

Current management approaches on the Peninsula illustrate how **outdated conservation paradigms**, focused on coercion and removal, impede the pursuit of coexistence and contribute to broader patterns of ecological degradation.

The proposed Draft Plan, which contemplates the removal of several baboon troops, represents the abandonment of even a nominal commitment to coexistence. Such removals are highly likely to result in the extermination of individuals, the disruption of troop cohesion, and cascading ecological consequences within a habitat of global biodiversity significance.

No lasting progress can be achieved while discourse and policy remain entrenched in the **language of elimination**. A shift towards Harmonious Coexistence is not only necessary for the survival of the Peninsula's baboon population but also for safeguarding the ecological integrity of the Cape Floristic Region in the face of climate change, habitat fragmentation, and biodiversity loss.

Rehabilitation, Not Removal

Removal is not a solution; it is a symptom of systemic failure. The way forward lies in rehabilitation, restoration, and rethinking our relationship with Nature. To begin repairing its fractured bond with wildlife, the JTT must shift from a conservation paradigm of control and elimination to one of ecological restoration and care.

An anonymous artist painted a striking mural of bullets near a baboon with a bleeding heart in Simon's Town, June 2025. The artwork captures the growing public outcry, reflected in a [rapidly expanding local PETITION](#) opposing the continuation of cruel management practices.

COCT must immediately impose a moratorium on all planned baboon removals. Any future decision must be based on interdisciplinary knowledge, transparency, procedural fairness, and genuine public consultation. This contrasts sharply with the flawed process imposed on the Cape Peninsula Baboon Advisory Group, which was handed the baboon removal final decision without being consulted.

CapeNature and SANParks must commit to large-scale habitat restoration. This means rehabilitating degraded zones, creating corridors and large ecological patches, and planting

indigenous food-bearing species essential for baboon and other wildlife survival, reducing their dependence on urban waste.

COCT must implement its own mitigation strategies and bylaws on waste management, WildCT, and the Cape Peninsula Baboon Strategic Management Plan by promoting true interdepartmental collaboration between waste management, law enforcement, urban planning, and environmental units.

This crisis is not simply political. It is ecological, ethical, and cultural. It will only be resolved when the question shifts: not how to remove baboons, but how to restore the environments that have failed them.

MARTELLO: A STRONG AND WISE ALPHA MALE FULFILLING HIS NATURAL ROLE

Mock Charges in Elephants and Baboons: Decoding Key Communication of African megafauna and non-human primates

A *mock charge* is a defensive display frequently observed in large mammals such as elephants and baboons. It involves a rapid advance toward a perceived threat, often accompanied by vocalisations, posturing, or ground displays, but stops short of physical attack.

Ethological studies confirm that this behaviour is not an act of aggression but a form of communication designed to establish boundaries, deter intrusion, and prevent escalation into physical conflict.

In elephants, mock charges are well-documented and are often experienced by tourists to Africa as a dramatic, mostly thrilling, yet not really dangerous encounter. Similarly, dominant male baboons frequently employ mock charges as a natural and context-specific behaviour, particularly when defending access to food or troop members. These actions are ritualised signals, warnings rather than assaults, that form part of complex primate and megafauna communication systems.

Misinterpretation of mock charges as “attacks” reflects a lack of public understanding. Education is critical: recognising the distinction between communication and aggression reduces fear, prevents unnecessary retaliation against wildlife, and fosters coexistence.

Studies in human-wildlife conflict show that fear-based narratives, when uncorrected, lead to increased hostility and intolerance towards Indigenous wildlife, and create the conditions for public support of lethal control.

Humans co-evolved alongside species capable of challenging them. Our survival relied on interpreting such signals correctly. The modern, over-protected lifestyle has dulled this sensitivity, fuelling both entitlement to occupy wildlife spaces and exaggerated fear when boundaries are enforced.

It is deeply troubling when authorities entrusted with protecting wildlife, and claiming to base their management on the best available science, issue misleading statements that no credible primatologist would support. In our view, the continued misrepresentation of animal communication becomes a deliberate tool to justify elimination.

Mislabelling a mock charge as an “attack” erodes tolerance, justifies violence against wildlife, and distorts conservation priorities. Education that frames these encounters as natural communication, rather than aggression, is essential for building informed, respectful, and harmonious coexistence within wildlife.

CONCLUSION

In light of the serious procedural flaws outlined above, it is our considered position that no legitimacy can be attached to this consultation process or to any decisions flowing from it. The constitutional and statutory duties of the City of Cape Town, CapeNature, and SANParks cannot be delegated to civil society, nor discharged through rushed, exclusionary, or perfunctory processes.

Accordingly, we call for an immediate ***moratorium*** on the killing or removal of baboons, whether individual animals or entire troops, pending the establishment of a lawful, transparent, and inclusive process. Such a moratorium must remain in place until:

1. **all reasonable and non-lethal mitigation measures have been properly implemented, monitored, and exhausted** in line with section 2 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA), which requires that the well-being of wild animals be explicitly considered in all decision-making;
2. **a genuinely multidisciplinary expert panel** is transparently and fairly constituted, including specialists in animal behaviour, conservation science, welfare, Indigenous knowledge systems, and human-wildlife conflict;
3. **The public is not only consulted but meaningfully engaged and educated** by the responsible authorities, so that residents can understand both their obligations and their role in coexisting with baboons as indigenous, ecologically important animals;
4. **Accountability mechanisms are established** to ensure that both the authorities and the public bear responsibility for protecting baboons and addressing the human-generated attractants (such as poor waste management and habitat destruction) that underlie conflict.

Absent these conditions, any invasive, quick-fix actions against baboons, including removals, forced relocations, or killings, would not only be unlawful but also ethically indefensible, undermining the principles of cooperative governance, environmental justice, and the constitutional mandate to protect biodiversity for present and future generations.

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Beloved Simon's Town baboon euthanised, X-rays reveal several bullet wounds